DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 410 666 EA 028 564

TITLE	School Improvement Team: Parents' Handbook.
INSTITUTION	North Carolina State Dept. of Public Instruction, Raleigh.
PUB DATE	1997-00-00
NOTE	41p.
AVAILABLE FROM	North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, Publication Sales, Room B75, 301 N. Wilmington Street, Raleigh, NC 27601-2825 (Stock No. SR-136; $2 prepaid, plus $4 shipping and handling; actual shipping plus $2 handling invoiced with purchase orders.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom (055)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Educational Improvement; Elementary Secondary Education; Management Teams; *Parent Participation; *Parent Role; Parent School Relationship; *Participative Decision Making; Policy Formation; *School Based Management
IDENTIFIERS	*North Carolina; *School Improvement Teams

ABSTRACT

The role of parents in school-based management is extremely important. All public schools in North Carolina are required to have school-improvement teams, which are usually composed of the principal, teachers, and parents. This handbook was designed to help parents and principals understand and define the parents' role on the school-improvement team. The intent is to give a basic overview of school-improvement teams and to clarify the role, rights, and responsibilities of parents in the process. A glossary and resource information are included. (LMI)

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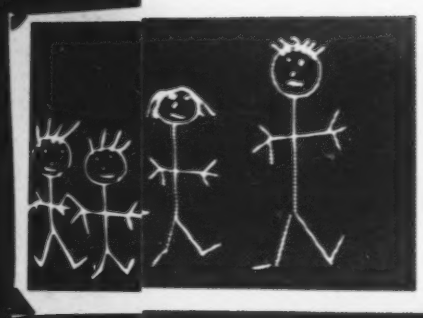
School Improvement Team



Parents' Handbook

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Public Schools of North Carolina
State Board of Education
Department of Public Instruction
In cooperation with North Carolina PTA

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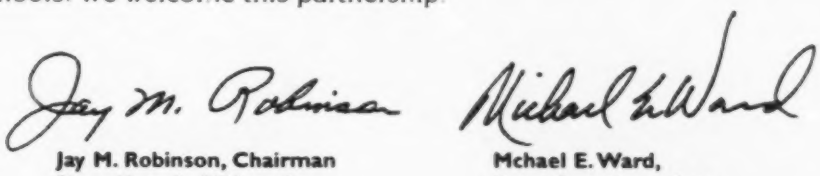
A Message for Parents

You are a critical part of North Carolina's efforts to improve our schools. As parents and former school administrators, we know how important it is to teachers, principals and other staff members for parents to be involved in their children's education.

One avenue for school involvement is participation on the school improvement team in our schools. These teams are designed to make key decisions about the operation of schools to improve student performance and success. We realize that there are varying degrees of involvement by parents and by school improvement teams in school decision-making in our state. Our hope is that every school will empower its school improvement team to guide the school's progress — that is true local control.

This handbook will help parents and principals understand and define the parents' role on the school improvement team. It follows the design of a document that is being used by parents who are involved on school improvement teams in Kentucky.

We are grateful to Jane Boyer, a Kentucky parent and an active PTA member, for her work on this publication. Thanks also to the North Carolina PTA for its support of this handbook. We believe this document will help parents better understand their roles and their influence in our schools. We welcome this partnership.



Jay M. Robinson, Chairman
State Board of Education

Mchael E. Ward,
State Superintendent

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Introduction

This handbook on school improvement teams/school-based management is for parents and parent organizations. It was written for parents by a parent who is not a professional educator and who has the same questions and concerns as other parents. Its goal is to assist parents in understanding the role of school improvement teams. The intent is to give a basic overview of school improvement teams and to clarify the role, rights and responsibilities of parents in this process. It will not answer all questions regarding school-based management, but will provide guidance and resources to help find the answers that parents are seeking.

School-based management recognizes that students learn at significantly higher levels when decisions are made at the school to meet students' individual needs. This is accomplished by placing important decisions in the hands of a team, generally including the school principal, teachers and parents — the people who know the students best. School-based management further confirms that parents have a great deal to contribute to the design of this individualized learning environment.

The role of the parents in school-based management is extremely important. Research shows that when parents are welcomed into the school and become a part of the school's daily operation, student achievement improves. Since school improvement requires the active involvement of parents to succeed, schools must actively seek the involvement of parents and consistently try to bring them into the policy-making process of the school.

The ABCs of Public Education

The ABCs of Public Education is a comprehensive plan to reorganize public schools in North Carolina.

The ABCs plan was developed by the State Board of Education as directed by the 1995 General Assembly. It was ratified by the 1996 General Assembly. The goal of the ABCs is to make more progress in student achievement, and to focus on accountability and high standards, basic subjects, and local control over educational decisions.

Local Schools and The ABCs

- renewed emphasis on reading, writing and mathematics, especially in the early grades;
- less state-required testing;
- more freedom from state rules and regulations for successful local schools;
- incentive funding for schools achieving at high levels;
- achievement measured school-by-school, not school district by school district; and
- targeted technical assistance for schools that need it most.

Strong Accountability

Under The ABCs, individual schools are held accountable for student performance through performance and growth standards, school incentive awards, recognition, assistance and intervention.

Better Schools Through Basics

High standards for student achievement are at the center of The ABCs. Grades 3-8 are monitored in reading, writing and mathematics. Specific courses and components in high schools also are monitored, including Algebra I, English I, U.S. History, Biology and Economic/Legal/Political Systems. Other measures are a high school writing test and a comprehensive reading and mathematics test given in 10th grade.

Local Control and Flexibility

Local control and flexibility are accomplished through school-based management. Some state laws have been and are being modified to clarify roles.

Definition of School-Based Management

School-based management is, by definition, "a decentralized, shared process in which the local school becomes the place where most of the policies and plans for schooling take place." It brings together the people who know best what all students in that school need to learn and succeed. Those people are the parents, teachers and principals.

The Washington State PTA defines school-based management as "the meaningful involvement of all the 'stakeholders' of a school in all policy decisions affecting the improvement of student learning." The "stakeholders" include both the providers and the consumers, i.e., the professional educators and the parents of the students to be educated.

School-based management is a way of reorganizing school leadership and management so that those at the school site are given more of the management and decision-making responsibility. It shifts decision-making from the central authority of the state, district superintendent or school board to the local school's educational staff and parents.

What is a School Improvement Team?

A school improvement team (usually the principal, teachers and parents) implements school-based management at the local school. All public schools in North Carolina are required to have school improvement teams.

Benefits of School-Based Management

There are many reasons why parents and educators would want to participate in school-based management at their school, but the single most important reason is to improve student learning.

School-based management improves student learning in several ways:

• The decisions affecting education and educational resources are moved closest to where education takes place. Better decisions are made because the people who will be affected by those decisions will share in making them and will be accountable for them. Better educational decisions lead to improved student learning.

• The best decisions usually come from group decision-making that involves both the providers (professional educators) and the consumers (parents of the students to be educated) who are treated equally and have equal influence in the decision-making process. Decisions are based on a broad range of knowledge involving different perspectives, which generally result in improved student learning.

• Studies have shown that when parents are involved in their children's education and schools, the level of student academic performance is greatly enhanced. Getting parents involved in the educational process in meaningful ways is one of the best, easiest and most effective ways to improve student learning.

• School-based management provides a method of on-going conversation between the consumers and the providers on how education can be delivered. It can identify how the providers and the consumers can support one another. Successful school-based management creates a process where all interested groups — educators, administrators, principals, licensed and classified staff, parents, students and the community — can work as a team to improve student learning.

NC PTA Position

School-based management is consistent with the policies of PTA and other parent-teacher organizations:

"North Carolina PTA supports site-based management and local control when parents are included as equal partners in the process. North Carolina PTA encourages the State Board of Education and local school systems to give parents, teachers and principals maximum flexibility from unnecessary restrictions and greater input into the processes of budgeting, curriculum selection and other educational decisions which impact schools and students."

The National PTA, in its bylaws (Article III, d), states: "The organization shall work with the schools to provide quality education for all children and youth and shall seek to participate in the decision-making process establishing school policy . . ."

Parent-teacher organizations have a responsibility to participate in the decisions affecting policies, rules and regulations. With the support of parents and parent-teacher organizations, school-based management has a greater chance for success.

School-Based Management Builds on Efforts

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School-based management is not just a North Carolina process. It is occurring in almost all of the states in the nation at some level, and several places have mandated school-based management just as in North Carolina. In every state, however, there are some differences and these differences can be very specific.

In North Carolina, school-based management and accountability are part of The New ABCs of Public Education, ratified during the 1996 session of the North Carolina General Assembly. All North Carolina public schools are required to participate in the school-based management and accountability programs of the ABCs.

School-based management is not new in North Carolina. The school improvement teams, which already are required in North Carolina public schools, are school-based management. Your school improvement team can be your school-based management team if it continues to meet regularly after your School Improvement Plan is developed and approved, and if it concerns itself with the entire school program.

"It was because of the large number of parents involved in our school as volunteers, serving on the School Improvement Team, helping with the school reading program and tutoring, that we met our goals for student achievement."
Norma McDonald, Principal

Who serves on a school improvement team?
North Carolina law is very specific about school improvement teams, which are required to include:

- the principal of each school;
- representatives of the assistant principals, instructional personnel, instructional support personnel and teacher assistants assigned to the school building; and
- parents of children enrolled in the school (reflecting the socio-economic and demographics of the school).

Qualifications to Consider:
The following are some suggested qualifications for parents to serve on school improvement teams:

- Is the person committed to improving the education of ALL children in the school?
- Will the person attend all team meetings and thoroughly prepare for them?
- Will the person participate as an equal member of the team?
- Is the person committed to representing ALL the parents of the school?
- Will the person commit to regularly attending meetings of the PTA and other parent-teacher organizations to keep parents informed?
- Will the person commit to working with the PTA and other parent-teacher organizations to establish methods of soliciting parent input before decisions are made by the team?
- Is the person someone who does not have a personal agenda or single- issue reason for participating?

Term of Office

North Carolina law does not specify the term of office for school improvement team members. Although three-year terms may sound logical since that is the length of a School Improvement Plan, it is not very practical. That is too long a commitment to expect a parent to make. Many parents do not know what their lives will be like three years into the future and may be hesitant to serve if the term is that long. In addition, that would make all parents with children in the last two years of a school ineligible. Having only parents of first-year students in a three-year middle school, for example, is not a good representation of parents, nor is it in the best interest of the students or the school.

One-year terms with the option of serving one or more additional terms is more reasonable. More parents will be willing to make that commitment, and the parents with students in the upper grades of a school will not be excluded. Another possibility is to have different length terms and/or staggered terms so only part of a team will have terms expire each year, and so those parents of children with only one year left in a school are not excluded. Schools should select an option that best meets school needs and that ensures maximum parental involvement.

Student Involvement

Something all school-based teams in the middle and high schools need to consider is whether to involve students in the school-based management process.

There are many advantages to involving secondary school students. Here are just a few:

- Students know what is happening at the school better than the parents and sometimes better than the professional educators.
- Students bring a different perspective to the discussion of the issues affecting their education. It is a valid perspective, and most groups that include students as equal partners in the deliberation process feel they are more successful because of the student participation.
- One of the main purposes of school-based or shared management is to bring together all the "stakeholders" in the decision-making process of the school. Students are definitely stakeholders.

Training

Parent team members and others who serve on School Improvement Teams need training in the operations of a school. Many parents may not be familiar with school budgeting, hiring practices, curriculum selection and other operations. It is also a good idea to talk about the changing roles and responsibilities of parents, teachers and other team members under school-based management.

Member Selection

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Selection of Members

North Carolina law does not specify how team members, except for parent members, should be selected. That is left up to each local school. This is a very important issue that all parents and employees of each school should consider carefully. How your team members are selected will have an impact on the success of your team. There are many methods of selection. The three most common are: 1) all who volunteer; 2) appointment; and 3) election.

All Who Volunteer: All persons who are eligible to serve and want to serve are included on the school improvement team.
Appointment: Team members are picked to serve on the school improvement team.
Election: Team members are chosen in an election to serve on the school improvement team.

Number of Members

The law in North Carolina likewise does not specify the number of team members. Again, this is left up to each local school. The law implies that there should be at least two parent members. Teams must be large enough to include representatives of each of the specified educator groups and include the required racial/socio-economic mix of parents. Teams should be small enough to accomplish the tasks related to school improvement.

Suggested Preliminary Procedure

Regardless of the method used to select your school improvement team, it is important for all eligible team members to have the opportunity to indicate their interest and willingness to serve. For this to be possible, all eligible team members must be informed that team selection is taking place, the criteria for eligibility, the responsibilities of team membership, and how much time it will take to participate. In addition, they need to be informed of what exactly a school improvement team is, what it does and how important it is to the schools.

For the representatives of the professional educators, such as the teachers, the selection process is fairly easy, for they all work at the school. For the parents, this is more difficult. Information can be sent home with the students, but some parents may not receive it. The material can be

mailed, but many people do not regularly read all their mail and mailing is expensive. Other means of communications include:

- Hold informational meetings at school;
- Hold informational meetings where parents gather in the community —at community centers, libraries, churches and places of employment;
- Ask your PTA, PTSA or other parent-teacher organization to make informational phone calls to all parents;
- Ask teachers and administrators to share information in their routine communications with parents;
- Provide information to parents regularly at all PTA, PTSA or other parent-teacher meetings and in all newsletters sent out by the school and the parent organizations;
- Provide information at all sporting events and other activities that occur at the school, and at as many community activities as possible;
- Keep a list of all parents who attend informational meetings, all parents who have been contacted by phone, and all parents who have responded to written information that was distributed. Make as many personal visits as possible to those who have not yet been reached; and
- Ask local news media to publish information.

If you do as much as you can of the above list, there are very few parents who will not be informed about your school improvement teams.

Parent Selection

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Selection of All Who Volunteer

One method of selecting your school improvement team is to open team membership to all who are interested in participating. This has a distinct advantage over other selection methods because all who want to are allowed to participate. This avoids the "them versus us" and the "in group/out group" mentality. This is the most inclusive of all selection methods.

Some may express concern that team membership that is open to everyone may get too large, but there are schools in North Carolina that use this method very successfully, even with very large teams. It works because the parents feel an ownership of the improvement plan and other decision-making because they have not been excluded from the process.

Selection by Election

Another method of obtaining team members is by election. This is the method currently used to select the teacher members of the school improvement team. A bill approved in 1997 by the North Carolina General Assembly requires that "Unless the local board of education has adopted an election policy, parents shall be elected by parents of children enrolled in the school in an election conducted by the parent and teacher organization of the school or, if none exists, by the largest organization of parents formed for this purpose."

For the election of the parent members of the school-based team to be fair and equitable, all parents must be given the opportunity to run.

Additional means of communicating with parents are:

- Prepare a nomination form that can be either self-nominating or used to nominate another parent;
- Include the nomination form in all the information letters and distribute it at all informational meetings;
- Prior to the election, hold a meeting with all the candidates so the parents will have the opportunity to meet them; and
- Consider holding the election over a period of time, instead of just at one meeting. This will give more parents the opportunity to vote.

Who Is Eligible to Vote?

The law requires that parent-members of school improvement teams be elected by parents. Those parents who have children attending the school are eligible to vote for the parent team members, just as they are eligible to serve as parent team members and vote on decisions made by the team.

Sample Nomination Form

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Parent Member of the School-Based Team

Deadline: Must be postmarked by (Date) _____
Return Completed Nomination Form to:_____
c/o (Name, Address of School)

Qualifications: A parent team member shall be a parent, stepparent, foster parent or legal guardian of a student enrolled in the school.
Expectations: (Outline expectations of members)

The Term of Office is _____ years.

Parents may nominate themselves or another parent.

Name of Nominee _____ Date _____
Address _____ Phone_____
Children enrolled in this school:
(name) _____
Nominated by: _____

I accept this nomination and agree to serve on the team if (elected or appointed).
Signature of Nominee: _____ Date _____

Please attach a single-page resume of your background, experience and interests. Include a statement on why you want to serve on the school-based team. This information will be shared with voters.

Team Responsibility

The school improvement team has the responsibility of developing the school's improvement plan.

School Improvement Plans

A School Improvement Plan outlines the methods, developed by the school improvement team, by which a school intends to strengthen student performance. Technically, the School Improvement Plan is "the end result of a process by which a school studies its past performance and develops a guide and benchmarks to improve student performance in that school."

North Carolina law states that "in order to improve student performance, each school shall develop a School Improvement Plan that takes into consideration the annual performance goal for that school that is set by the State Board of Education."

North Carolina law states that "parental involvement is a critical component of school success and positive student achievement; therefore, it is the intent of the General Assembly that parents, along with teachers, have a substantial role in developing School Improvement Plans. To this end, school improvement team meetings shall be held at a convenient time to assure substantial parent participation." This means that team meetings may not be held at a time that conflicts with a parent member's work schedule. It also means that parent members must be involved throughout the entire plan development process. Generally, the process will include the following activities:

- assess needs;
- seek information;
- establish priorities;
- develop plans;
- implement plans;
- evaluate plans;
- review plans (annually, if not more often);
- communicate results.

It is not the intent of the law for the professional educators to develop the plan, then give it to the parent members to "sign-off on."

"Throughout the year, it was essential that we keep our goal in mind — to improve our school by improving our test scores. This focus was determined by the Team and disseminated to the school faculty and parents."

Troy McAbee, parent

To Meet This Responsibility, Teams Should:

- collect, interpret, analyze information;
- set priorities;
- review reports of committees, and consider their recommendations;
- monitor implementation;
- evaluate achievement;
- make reports and recommendations;
- work as a team;
- hold regularly-scheduled meetings;
- conduct meetings in a democratic and open manner;
- request expert assistance when needed;
- maintain comprehensive minutes from each meeting;
- solve problems;
- solicit ideas from others on problems to be solved;
- cooperate/collaborate with the school district, with other districts and other public and private agencies; and
- work cooperatively with groups such as the PTA or PTSA [teams have no jurisdiction over the activities or budget of 501(c)(3) non-profit, independent organizations that work in the school, such as the PTA].

All Team Members Should:

- attend all school-based team meetings and actively participate;
- study state education laws and local school district policy; and
- solicit input/give reports to people they represent.

Parent Members Should:

- report at all PTA and other parent organization meetings to keep parents informed and solicit parents' opinions on issues before voting;
- increase broad-based parent involvement at all levels through team committees as well as school organizations, such as the PTA.

By Law, School-Based Management/Improvement Teams:

- are subject to open meetings laws;
- set their own meeting agendas and frequency of meetings;
- develop their own operating procedures;
- comply with federal and state laws governing education;
- comply with local school district policies;
- develop school improvement plans at least once every three years, but can amend the plans as often as necessary to continue improving; and
- determine expenditures of staff development funds allotted to the school.

When Making Decisions, Keep in Mind:

- Are the decisions legal?
- Are they targeted to student needs?
- Are they in line with board policy?
- Are they within the budget?

What Teams Can Do:

- Develop school improvement plans;
- Develop policies to enhance student achievement and meet education goals;
- Set the schedule within the school day;
- Adjust the school schedule so teachers have a planning period [some teams have even developed a schedule which gives teachers double planning periods];
- Serve as advisors to the principal and other members of the school staff whenever needed;
- Participate in interviewing for teaching and other staff positions [some teams do this; some do not];
- Advise or make decisions about the most effective use of school positions/staff, such as whether to employ a language teacher or a reading teacher;
- Serve as advisors in the selection of the following resources:
    - textbooks;
    - instructional materials, i.e., materials that help students learn or help teachers teach, other than textbooks;
    - student support services, i.e., services that help students become ready and able to learn.
- Assist the school staff in the development of the following areas:
    - enhancing school environment;
    - use of school space;
    - classroom management;
    - extracurricular activities and programs;
    - increasing parent involvement.
- Develop processes for deciding:
    - whether the school is in line with state standards;
    - technology needs and use of technology;
    - how the school determines whether its programs work.

What Teams Cannot Do:

- Run the school on a day-to-day basis;
- Give final approval to the School Improvement Plan. [This is done first by the professional educators at the school, then submitted to the local school board for final approval.];
- Break local, state or federal laws;
- Risk the health and safety of students or staff;

- Risk lawsuits;
- Enter into or break contracts;
- Spend money the school does not have; and
- Make decisions outside their areas of responsibility. [For example: evaluate or fire staff, set salaries, raise taxes, set bus routes, assign students to schools, decide when to build new buildings, pay utility bills, etc.]

All public officials have a responsibility to their constituents. Members of school improvement teams are no exception.

Representing the Entire Constituency

The parent members of a school-based team represent all the parents, stepparents and legal guardians of every student in the school. It is important for the parent members to remember this whenever speaking on issues, taking part in consensus decision-making or voting. Most parent members of teams truly want to do a good job representing the other parents, but often do not know how. It is easy to rely on what friends and acquaintances say, and it is easy to believe that their opinions are truly representative of all parents. But actually, they are just the opinions of a few. The issue is how to know what most parents really want.

Finding Out What Parents Want

The best way to learn what parents want is to ask them. That is not always practical, however, because most schools have too many parents for any one person to talk to them all on a regular basis. Therefore other methods need to be sought. The best methods are ones that involve regular opportunities for open communication between ALL parents and the parent team members. Two of the best methods are through PTA (PTO) meetings and newsletters:

PTA (Other Parent-Teacher Association) Meeting

The PTA (or other parent-teacher association) meeting is a good place for communication between the parent team members and other parents to take place. It is recommended that there be time on the agenda of every PTA meeting for the parent team members to give a report of what the team is doing and what decisions they are considering. There should be time for questions and comments, an opportunity for parents to speak with the team members either before or after the meeting, and an opportunity for written questions for those who do not feel comfortable asking in front of others. For this method of communication to be effective, it is necessary for the PTA to invite every parent to the meetings and to let them know they will have the opportunity to give input to the parent team members.

PTA Newsletter

The PTA (or other parent-teacher organization) newsletter goes to all families that have children in the school and is an ideal tool for written communication between parent team members and parents. It is recommended that the PTA set aside a section of each newsletter for team information. The newsletter also can be used to survey parents to learn their opinions on various issues.

The way to get these two methods of communication started is for the PTA (or other parent-teacher organization) president, program chair, newsletter chair and the parent team members to meet and for all parties to agree to do this regularly. For parent team members to attend meetings, it is important to be aware of their work schedules and other commitments so meetings can be scheduled at times when they will be able to attend. It is recommended that all PTA meetings be scheduled at times that the parents are able to attend. Be sure to give the parent team members plenty of advance notice of the date, time and place of all meetings. For parent team members to put information in your PTA newsletter, they must be given advance notice of publication deadlines.

Reaching the Hard to Reach

There are always going to be people who do not come to PTA meetings and people who will not respond to written requests for information or opinions. The question is "How can we reach these people?" The best way is to go where they are. Contact neighborhood groups, churches and other organizations that have members who have children in the school. Put information in their newsletters and attend their meetings. Reach out to them. You may want to consider regular communication through a large local employer. Chances are a lot of their employees are parents.

Trust

It is important to develop trust between the parent team members and the parents they represent. Trust means many things, including having confidence in a person; relying on a person's integrity; the stability of action or conduct and the absence of deception. There are several ways to build trust including: opening the budget, keeping confidential information confidential, treating everyone as an equal to yourself, treating everyone as equal to each other, being accessible to constituents and acknowledging mistakes.

Team Committees

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The work of committees is often the backbone of school improvement teams. The majority of the policies adopted by the teams may be developed by committees of the team.

There are two basic reasons why a school improvement team would want to have committees:
• Using committees spreads the work out among a larger number of people, which assists the school team with its work.
• Using committees involves more people in the process of school-based management.

Types of Committees
Here are just a few of the possible committees that would be beneficial to a school improvement team:

- budget/finance;
- discipline;
- technology;
- scheduling: school day;
- scheduling: school space;
- textbooks;
- student support services;
- school climate and safety;
- school improvement planning;
- curriculum and instruction;
- professional development;
- instructional practices;
- personnel screening;
- instructional materials;
- parent and community involvement;
- student involvement; and
- communications.

Committee Members

The membership of committees, both by categories (such as parent, teacher, etc.) and number, is something the school team must decide. Ideally, membership on team committees would be open to all who are interested and who volunteer to serve. All committees should include both parents and professional educators and can also include other members of the school staff. Committees are an excellent way to increase parent involvement.

Responsibilities of the School-Based Team to Committees:

- Provide meaningful assignments based on needs of the school;
- Provide clear directions for what is to be accomplished;
- Provide timelines for reporting progress and making recommendations to the school team;
- Make available needed resources for accomplishing tasks;
- Provide agenda time for committee reports, questions and concerns; and
- Keep a finger on the pulse of the school and community and as needs arise, form committees to investigate, analyze and make recommendations to the school team.

Responsibilities of Committees to the School-Based Team:

- Accept challenges, tasks and charges from the school team, then investigate, analyze and develop a faculty/parent consensus on recommendations to be made for team adoption;
- Provide periodic updates to the school team on the status of its work; and
- Consider the experience of the committee members and the experience of colleagues, and the comments of students, parents and others when making recommendations to the school team.

Characteristics of Effective Committees:

- Have a clear, stated purpose;
- Foster informality;
- Encourage participation;
- Listen actively;
- Disagree without being disagreeable;
- Reach decisions by consensus;
- Ensure open communication;
- Recognize diversity; and
- Have clear roles and work assignments.

When deciding whether or not to have committees, remember the diversity and inclusiveness that committees can bring to the decision-making process. Committees broaden the base of support and involvement. This is especially important if your school-based team is restricted by being open only to those who are appointed or elected.

Team Meetings

School improvement teams schedule their own meetings, but they must obey North Carolina's Open Meetings Law, which protects the public's right to know about and attend meetings where government decisions are discussed or made. The law applies to school improvement teams because they can be defined as "public bodies." They involve more than two members and they serve an advisory or administrative role. The law specifically defines public body to include "any appointed or elected authority, board, commission, team or other bodies of...school administrative units."

Open Meetings Law

All "official" team meetings are subject to the Open Meetings Law. Official meetings are those where a majority of the group gets together to conduct a hearing, deliberate (discuss issues), take action or otherwise transact public business, in this case, public school business.

Meeting Notification Requirement

The intent of the Open Meetings Law is that public business be handled publicly, with access available to the public. To comply with the intent of the law, the public must be notified. North Carolina law requires different types of notification for four different types of meetings: regular, special, emergency and recessed. Only the first two, regular and special, are likely to apply to your school improvement team.

Regular Meetings

If your school-based team holds its meetings at a set day, time and place each month (or each week, every two weeks, etc.), then its meetings are considered regular. Team meetings which are held on the first Tuesday of each month at 7 p.m. in the school cafeteria are regular meetings, for example. The only notification required by law is to file a notice of the day, time and place of the regular meetings in a central place, such as the principal's office or the school district's central office (or both). If you change the regular meeting day, time, or place, you must file notice of the new schedule at least seven days before the first meeting under the new schedule. The law does not require you to send special notice of your meetings to the news media, but you may if you wish. Remember to keep in mind the schedules of working parents in setting meeting times.

Special Meetings

If your school-based team does not have a fixed schedule for its meetings, but meets on different days and at different times or places during the year, all of the meetings are considered special meetings. If your team has regular meetings, but is changing one of the meeting days, time or place, or is holding an additional meeting, these also are considered special meetings. There are two methods of notifying the public of special meetings:

- post a notice;
- mail or deliver a notice to every person who has requested it.

In both cases, notice must be given 48 hours before the meeting, and the notice must state the place, time and purpose of the meeting. You can post your notice on a centrally located bulletin board or on the door of the meeting site. In the case of sending written notices to those requesting them, the intent is to give all these individuals at least 48 hours' advance notice.

Appropriate Notice

If your school-based team follows these procedures, it will be complying with the law. However, you may give all the additional notice you wish. You may notify the news media and include notices in your school and parent organization newsletters. You also may mail special notices of your meetings to the parents or send notices home with the students. The more notice you give, the more your constituents — the parents, educators and the community — will feel that you are trying to keep them informed. This will increase their confidence in your team and in the decisions your team makes.

Minutes

The law requires that full and accurate minutes be kept of all official meetings of your school-based team. This does not mean that every word spoken must be recorded. The minutes should reflect all action taken, whether by vote or consensus, and all subjects that were discussed. Minutes may be recorded on audio or video tape. An accurate set of minutes includes the following:

- the date, time and place of the meeting as per the meeting notice, and the time the meeting was called to order;
- a statement on the approval of the minutes of previous meetings;

- a list of all committees, sub-groups and individuals who gave reports and any recommended action;
- a list of all individuals and groups who addressed the school team;
- a list of all decisions reached by consensus and all motions approved or defeated by vote; this should include the exact wording of the consensus decision and the exact wording of any motions;
- items that were placed on the agenda for the next meeting; and
- the time the meeting adjourns.

The team should appoint a person to act as secretary. The secretary can be a team member or someone not on the team who agrees to attend meetings and take minutes.

Sample Team Meeting Agenda

- Call to Order
  The meeting is called to order by the chair. The secretary records the date, time and place and names of those attending.
- Approval of Minutes
  The chair asks if there are any additions or corrections to the minutes. If not, the chair states the minutes are approved as printed. If there are corrections or additions, the chair states the minutes are approved as corrected. It is not necessary to have a motion to approve the minutes.
- Chairperson's Report
  This is optional, but may be a regular part of the agenda. It's the time for the team chair to report anything noteworthy to the group.
- Reports from Committees, Sub-Groups and Individuals
  All committees and sub-groups of the team should give a report on their activities and recommendations. Individuals who have been given assignments by the team should also report at this time.
- Discussion of Recommendations
  The recommendations of the committees, sub-groups and individuals are discussed.
- Individuals Wishing to Address the Team
  This is the time for individuals to speak. Policies developed by the team may limit the speakers' time to address the group and require those who wish to speak to sign up in advance to be placed on the meeting agenda.
- Groups Wishing to Address the Team
  This is the time for groups such as the PTA and other parent organizations to speak before the team. [Remember, school-based teams have no authority over the activities or funds of 501(c)(3) non-profit organizations working within the school.]
- Action Items
  This is the time for the team members to make decisions, either by consensus or by vote.
- Agenda for the Next Meeting.
  This is the time for the team members to establish what items will be discussed or decided on at the next meeting.
- Adjournment
  The meeting is over. The secretary records the time. It is customary to call for a motion to adjourn.

Who May Attend Team Meetings?

The Open Meetings Law requires that team meetings be open to the public and all interested persons may attend. The Law does not give the public the right to speak, make motions, debate or vote on business.

How Should Team Meetings Be Run?

Meetings should be run in a business-like manner, using generally accepted parliamentary procedure. The team must select a chair (often the principal) and someone (not necessarily a team member) to be responsible for taking accurate minutes. The team will set its own operating procedures and may adopt rules it will use when conducting meetings.

It is suggested that teams make decisions by consensus as often as possible. When doing so, the members need to be sure that they agree on a definite statement of their final conclusion, so that the person taking the minutes can describe the decisions accurately and so there is a clear statement of what is to be done. When it is necessary to vote on final decisions, ideally those votes will also reflect general agreement about how the school should proceed, not only within the team, but among staff and parents. To be most effective, each team decision needs as broad a base of support as possible.

When a vote is close (such as 6 to 5 with 11 members voting) or one-sided (such as most of the parents on one side of the issue and most of the professional educators on the opposing side), it is a good idea to continue working on the issue. Usually, with a little more time, it is possible to find a solution that has broader support. Decisions that are so closely divided may not be in the best interest of the school/students.

These are procedural areas your school-based team should consider:

- develop a timely method for notifying team members of meetings;
- provide written copies of the agenda and minutes to team members in advance of the meetings;
- determine the quorum (usually a majority — one more than half — of the team members) that is needed to transact business;
- develop procedures for individuals/groups to address the team;
- develop the procedure the team will use to let its constituents know of its decisions; and
- develop a policy for those who may wish to abstain from voting.

Decision by Consensus

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Consensus Process

Consensus decision-making is a process used to ensure that every individual has input into a decision. It is useful in helping teams work together on goals, planning, implementation, problem-solving and decision-making. Consensus is recommended for all school improvement teams.

Consensus Means:

- All group members contribute;
- The opinions of all interested parties are encouraged and acknowledged;
- Differences are viewed as helpful;
- Everyone has an opportunity to express feelings about the issue;
- Those who disagree express a willingness to experiment for a certain period of time;
- All members share the final decision; and
- All members agree to take responsibility for implementing the final decision.

Consensus Does Not Mean:

- A unanimous vote;
- The result is everyone's first choice; and
- That everyone totally agrees with the decision.

How Consensus Works

The process of arriving at consensus requires team members to make every effort to accommodate varying positions and differing opinions. If they manage to do so, they develop a feeling of ownership and a commitment to successful implementation of the final solution. Consensus decisions include the opinions of many, and eventual agreements are a product of open discussion. When team members find it hard to reach consensus, they must reassess their positions to find areas of agreement and areas in which they are able to make more effort to accommodate diverse points of view. Reaching consensus may take longer, but it creates unity and commitment of team members.

This strategy depends on the willingness of individuals to back off from their personal interest after a certain point and at the same time to avoid backing off too easily. Its intent is to bring all parties to a mutually satisfy-

ing position on the problem or issue under study. Consensus is only possible when there is an over-riding commitment to the task and to long-range goals by all members. Each individual argues his part not to "win" necessarily, but because she or he believes that input from all will help develop a strong solution to the problem at hand.

Advantages of Consensus:

- Decisions are based on cooperation;
- Decision-making expresses a win / win philosophy;
- There is an emphasis on group unity;
- All concerns are accommodated;
- More creative ideas are explored; and
- There is a greater commitment to implementation.

Decision-Making Comparisons:

Voting:

- Considers two points of view;
- Discussion divides group;
- Freezes majority and minority on opposing sides; and
- Decisions made faster, but implemented slower.

Consensus:

- Considers many points of view;
- Solidifies the group through discussion;
- Allows all sides to feel heard and accepted; and
- Decisions made slower, but implemented faster.

Sounds of Consensus Building:

"Let's begin with a reaction by everyone in the group."
"Let me summarize what I hear you saying."
"Are we all comfortable with this recommendation?"
"Let me repeat what I think I heard you say."
"Let's begin by looking at this problem from a different perspective."
"Let me ask you . . . "
"I can see that point of view."
"Who cannot live with this decision?"
"Is anyone uncomfortable with this recommendation?"
"Does everyone feel like they have had the opportunity to express an opinion? Let me see if I can pull together our recommendation."
"Let's take some quiet time to re-evaluate our positions and prepare a

statement in writing to share in five minutes."
"Let's think about this question overnight and discuss it when we are fresh in the morning."
"Would we want to consider...?"
"Working together is a positive move by this group."

Adapted from Jim Guess, School-Based Management Consultant

AS A TEAM MEMBER:

1. Assume your decision-making powers with caution and after ample study and discussion.
2. Talk instruction first and routine operational matters later. After all, improving the instructional program gave birth to school-based management/improvement.
3. Remember that you are a decision-making body. Exercise that authority in a timely and efficient manner.
4. It is advisable to involve, interact and listen to those persons in your committee structure (if you have it). Do not forget to provide committee members recognition in the process.
5. You are challenged to focus on the academic performance of your school and its children with vision and creativity.
6. It is important to build on the positive and discard the negative.
7. Consensus decision-making is strongly advised for most, if not all, of the team action. (There needs to be a process in place for times when consensus is not possible.)
8. It is important to be trusting, open, and honest with each other.
9. Be careful about individual biases getting in the way of the team approach.
10. Utilize all training and resources available to you from your school district, PTA and Department of Public Instruction.
11. Where appropriate, use the brainstorming technique to better structure and implement your vision and strategies for improving the school.
12. Assist your school principal with the task of achieving effective daily operations; do not slow the process. (The principal must feel comfortable with discretionary powers within team policy.)
13. Be proud of what you do, and more importantly, for what you accomplish.
14. Share decisions with as many people as appropriate for the particular decision in question. That may include other system-wide resource people, the superintendent, the board of education, etc.
15. Protect confidentiality in school matters while protecting yourself.
16. Study the issues thoroughly enough to be reasonably sure it is best for your students or do not risk the decision.

17. Strive to make decisions on what you know to be true; not on what you perceive it to be.
18. Learn about the instructional processes being used by your school and attempt to determine the effectiveness.
19. Remember that when we share decisions we share responsibility.
20. Do not be misunderstood. Express what you want to happen in the school in policy terms.
21. Target your monies toward your primary task—improved student performance.
22. Coordinate and cooperate with your local school board to ensure success.
23. Ponder your perception of the school in July versus your perception the following June. What contributions have you made toward change?
24. Listen carefully to all your partners in this process, then your decisions will be much better.
25. Remember that the reason for having school improvement teams is to improve the educational opportunities and performance levels of students in the public schools of North Carolina. An added bonus is having the say-so locally over your schools.

Glossary

Accountability: the "A" of the ABCs; accountability is the way public schools assure the public of results. The ABCs model is a school-based accountability model. Reporting and accountability to the public will occur at the school level in addition to the system level.

ABCs: North Carolina's comprehensive plan to improve its public schools; ABCs focuses on strong Accountability, emphasis on the Basics and high educational standards, and maximum local Control.

Basics: The basic subject areas of reading, writing and mathematics will be measured through state assessments; the goal is to focus on students' learning necessary skills.

Control (local control): Local control means local school districts have the flexibility to make decisions that were formerly sent down from the state. It places responsibility for student learning and improving student performance and most matters pertaining to local schools in their communities with the local school boards and the local schools.

School-based: happening at the school; used to denote decision-making and management occurring at the local school that used to occur at the district or state level (see school-based management).

School-based decision-making: another term for school-based management; making decisions at the local school level.

School-based management: an approach that focuses as much decision-making as possible at the local school level relating to issues such as organizing instruction, use of resources and personnel; "a decentralized, shared process in which the local school becomes the place where most of the policies and plans for schooling take place;" making decisions at the local school rather than at the district or state levels; "the process and structure for shared decision-making at the school site with the goal of improved student performance."

School-based management team: a formally-structured group of people participating in school-based management; also may be called school leadership team, governance council, etc.

Site-based: another term for school-based.

Site-based decision-making: another term for school-based management.

Site-based management: another term for school-based management.

School improvement plan: the written school-level plan that includes strategies for improving student performance taking into account the annual performance goals for the school set by the State Board of Educa-

tion;" the methods, developed by the school improvement team, by which a school intends to strengthen student performance; the end result of a process by which a school studies its past performance and develops a guide and benchmarks to improve student performance in that school. Each school improvement plan must be in effect no more than three years but may be amended as often as necessary or appropriate.

School improvement team: the group of people responsible for developing the School Improvement Plan; school improvement teams must, by law, include the principal and representatives of assistant principals, instructional personnel, instructional support personnel (such as media specialists and counselors), and teacher assistants assigned to the school building, and parents of children enrolled in the school. Members may be elected, appointed or volunteer, and their length of terms is up to individual schools.

Where to Call for Help/ Information

ABCs HOTLINE 1-800-431-7373
Sponsored by the Public Schools of North Carolina
(State Board of Education/Department of Public Instruction)

NORTH CAROLINA PTA 919-787-0534; 1-800-255-0417
North Carolina Congress of Parents and Teachers

ACCOUNTABILITY 919-715-1348
(Testing Section, Department of Public Instruction)

INSTRUCTIONAL SERVICES 919-715-1495
(Curriculum Section, Department of Public Instruction)

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT 919-715-1906
(School Improvement Section, Department of Public Instruction)

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION WEBSITE
http://www.dpi.state.nc.us

YOUR LOCAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

YOUR LOCAL SUPERINTENDENT

YOUR LOCAL SCHOOL BOARD
Your local school district has policies regarding school-based management and school improvement teams. Contact the central office for details.

"If you want schools to get better, get parents involved. We used to try to fix things after the fact. Now, we try to work with families to prevent problems. If you have the families working with the schools, even before the children start school, you'll have success."
David Ricketts,
Superintendent

School Improvement Team
Parents' Handbook

• A handbook to help parents school administrators better understand their roles and responsibilities as members of local school improvement teams.

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